



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Changes to the 2008 Recreational Groundfish Regulations in the Northern and North-Central Groundfish Management Areas

**Q: What in-season regulation changes are proposed for California's recreational groundfish fishery? What areas do they affect?**

**A:** The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is taking in-season action to prohibit recreational fishing for groundfish in waters greater than 20 fathoms (120 feet) between the Oregon border and Pigeon Point in San Mateo County.

**Q: Why were these actions necessary? When do they take effect?**

**A:** The primary goal of these new regulations is to reduce the total harvest of yelloweye and canary rockfish by boat-based anglers in the Northern Management Area (Oregon to 40°10' N. latitude) and North-Central Management Area (40°10' N. latitude to Pigeon Point) (NMA and NCMA, respectively). In 2007, the California recreational fishery significantly exceeded its annual harvest limits in these areas for yelloweye and canary rockfish, resulting in early fishery closures. To ensure that harvest limits for these species aren't exceeded again in 2008, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) asked the DFG to examine ways to reduce their take in California's recreational fishery. Based on data analyses and recommendations by the DFG, the PFMC recommended a 20-fathom depth restriction for the NMA (May 1-December 31, 2008) and the NCMA (June 1-November 30, 2008).

**Q: Why is there so much concern about the take of yelloweye and canary rockfish?**

**A:** Yelloweye and canary rockfish are federally designated "overfished" species, which means that less than 25 percent of their estimated pre-fishery population now exists. Both species are late-maturing, slow-growing and long-lived; thus recovery will take many years. The yelloweye rockfish matures at about 22 years of age (approximately 18 inches in length) and lives to about 118 years old. Canary rockfish mature at 8 years of age (approximately 17 inches in length) and live up to 84 years. Stock assessments predict it will take 74 years for yelloweye rockfish and 11 years for canary rockfish populations to rebuild. Each year, the PFMC sets harvest limits for "overfished" species based on their respective stock rebuilding plans.

**Q: What other regulatory options were considered by the DFG to address the yelloweye and canary rockfish harvest limit overages?**

**A:** Other regulatory options considered by the DFG included a shorter season (possibly as short as 2 months) in the NMA and NCMA and reducing the groundfish bag limit to six fish or less. The DFG also considered closing specific areas that experienced high encounter rates with yelloweye rockfish.

**Q: How did DFG consider the needs of the fishing communities when it determined what actions to take?**

**A:** The DFG received direct input on possible regulatory options from their Groundfish Taskforce, which is comprised of California recreational industry and fishing advocacy

group representatives. In addition, the DFG heard public testimony from the PFMC's Groundfish Advisory Subpanel and the general public at the PFMC's March meeting in Sacramento. The general consensus was that depth and area restrictions were preferred over a shortened season. The Taskforce felt that a shortened season would be devastating to the economies of coastal ports in the NMA and NCMA, especially those north of Point Arena.

**Q: How can the recreational catch of yelloweye and canary rockfish exceed their harvest limits if anglers are not allowed to keep them?**

**A:** The DFG and PFMC must account for the "total take" when determining whether an "overfished" species has reached or exceeded its harvest limit. Total take includes:

- fish landed and kept,
- fish landed and released dead, and
- fish landed and released alive but will not survive due to hooking or handling stress.

Although there are anglers that keep "overfished" species (generally because they are unaware that the fish can't be retained), most anglers release the yelloweye and canary rockfish they catch. Actual landings, combined with reports of dead and live releases, are used to calculate the total take of these species.

**Q: How is DFG helping anglers to identify canary and yelloweye rockfish, so they can be handled properly and released?**

**A:** This season, DFG will be distributing yelloweye and canary rockfish identification flyers to the public through bait shops, harbor masters and CRFS samplers to help anglers identify their catch. This ID flyer is also available online at [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/canary\\_id.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/canary_id.pdf). DFG is also distributing a brochure with suggestions for how to properly release rockfish suffering from pressure shock to increase their chances of survival. This brochure is also available at [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf).

**Q: What will happen if anglers under-report yelloweye catch to CRFS samplers?**

**A:** Both under-reporting and over-reporting yelloweye or canary rockfish catches can have negative results for California recreational anglers. If an angler *inflates* the number of fish released, it results in an overestimation of harvest and could result in an unnecessary fishery closure. If released fish are *under-reported or not reported*, the stock assessments that use these data may underestimate their actual ocean abundance and lower harvest limits may be developed in the future to rebuild the population.

**Q: What can anglers do to contribute to the recovery of yelloweye and canary rockfish populations?**

**A:** Anglers can do the following to help conserve overfished rockfish species:

- Know your rockfish species and regulations. The California regulations booklet for Ocean Sport Fishing includes color illustrations of rockfish frequently encountered in California waters ([www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/fishid2008.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/fishid2008.pdf)). In addition, links

to numerous ocean finfish identification tools that can be found online at [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/fishid.asp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/fishid.asp).

- If yelloweye or canary rockfish are encountered when fishing, move to a different location to reduce contact with these species.
- Many anglers use a variety of methods to help fish descend back down to depth, increasing the likelihood of survival by reducing gas expansion injuries (pressure shock or *barotrauma*). Weighted upside-down milk crates, inverted barbless hooks and commercial fish descending devices are all effective in reducing release mortality. The sooner a fish can be returned to depth, the better its chances of full recovery. Information on gas expansion injuries and descending devices can be found at [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf). Please do not use a needle or other object to deflate a “bloated” fish as this can damage internal organs.
- Report catches and encounters to samplers as accurately as possible

**Q: What about the future of California’s recreational groundfish fisheries?**

**A:** DFG fishery managers are already in the process of evaluating regulations for the 2009-2010 season and will be determining which groundfish regulations will be most effective in minimizing encounters with “overfished” species while still providing recreational fishing opportunities coastwide. As the 2008 season progresses, DFG will be monitoring the fishery to see how effective the new depth regulations and voluntary avoidance are in reducing yelloweye and canary rockfish contacts. Two meetings will be held in early May to gather input on the current range of fishery alternatives for 2009-2010:

**May 1, 2008**

6 to 9 p.m.

City of Trinidad Town Hall  
409 Trinity St.  
Trinidad

**May 5, 2008**

4 to 7 p.m.

Sonoma County Water Agency  
404 Aviation Blvd.  
Santa Rosa

The press release containing meeting details is available at [www.dfg.ca.gov/news/news08/08033.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/news/news08/08033.html).

**If you would like to provide input or have comments regarding 2009-2010 recreational groundfish regulations**, please e-mail John Budrick ([jbudrick@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:jbudrick@dfg.ca.gov)) prior to May 31, 2008.

**For information on inseason regulation changes and how to stay informed, go to:** [dfg.ca.gov/marine/inseason2008.asp](http://dfg.ca.gov/marine/inseason2008.asp)

For more information on proper release of fish, go to: [www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/release.pdf)

For information on the Pacific Fishery Management Council go to: [www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org)